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Daniel Ellsberg, c/o Penguin Putnam Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York, 10014

SECRETS
READER RESPONSE

Dear Dr. Ellsberg:

Yes, over and over as far back in time as we can see. That behavior seems bred in the bone, but why? An interesting question, but this note is to thank you for a great book, not argue that hypocrisy is our most valuable survival skill. I groaned at the work you must have put into it! My shelves overflow, but Secrets stays. Thanks again.

All I can think to add is the possibility that the physical weight of numbers has already doomed self government. The wish for kings grows stronger. Sigh. Me? Old gink WW II, bookish. No computer and with any luck, I'll go to my grave without one.

Cheers.



Oh, one more factor: According to Henry Luce in his Fortune article, Arms and the Men, the business plan of the defense industry is: "A, Prolong War. B, Disturb Peace." (March, 1934. I turned 17 that year!)



Introduction

In July of 1963, nine years after the debacle at Dienbienphu, Denis Warner, the Australian journalist, told me how astounded he was to find the American generals in South Vietnam deluding themselves with the same false optimism the French generals had professed during the first Indochina war.

Warner, who has spent the last fifteen years covering Southeast Asia, had just returned from a trip through the villages and rice paddies of the Mekong Delta south of the capital. The Delta was the most important area in the country. The majority of the population and the bulk of the economic resources were concentrated there and the outcome of the struggle in the Delta would decide the war. Warner noted sadly that the Saigon government's position was crumbling there just as rapidly under the hammer blows of the Vietcong guerrillas as the French position in the Tonkin Delta in North Vietnam had eroded under pressure from the Vietminh insurgents in 1952.

On his return to Saigon, however, Warner had been shocked to hear the American generals assure him with the same false confidence the French had shown, that they were winning the war in the Delta. They had cited similarly meaningless statistics on the number of guerrillas supposedly killed and on the number of fortified hamlets that had been built. "I'll bet I could dig out my old notebooks and find almost identical statements by the French," Warner said.

Nine years after the disaster at Dienbienphu had ended more than eighty years of French rule in Indochina, much remained unchanged. The French generals and diplomats had departed, leaving their reputations moldering in the rice paddies. But they had been followed by American generals and diplomats who suffered, or were about to suffer, the same fate for similar reasons. The young French officers and foreign legionaries who had soothed their frayed nerves in the cabarets and

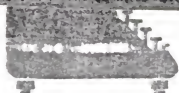
NUMBERS UP--FREEDOMS DOWN

Political candidates of both parties court public approval in different ways, but they speak with one voice when it comes to freedom. Both are solidly in favor of it, although they don't tell us exactly what it is because both parties continually add to the government rules that steadily restrict the very freedoms they praise. They also promise to shrink government drastically. They never do. They can't because government and restrictions follow population growth in strict obedience to Olney's Law: Numbers Up--Freedoms Down.

When I was a boy I lived in a neighborhood that had a single vacant lot where most of our Saturday clippings and prunings were dumped. It was therefore amazingly fertile and each spring it produced a riot of wild oats, mallow and mustard in which we kids rolled and tumbled. One spring, an old man from somewhere outside our ken arrived with a goat which he tethered in the midst of all that sweet greenery. The tether was long and the lucky goat could roam and browse wherever it pleased. Later, he brought two more goats and tethered them also. Naturally, all three tethers had to be shorter so the goats would not tangle with each other. Years later, I realized that we, too, have the tethers of our freedoms shortened, inch by inch, as our numbers rise higher on Earth, our own big green vacant lot.

In my lifetime, world population has exploded from two billion to nearly six billion, roughly triple in 75 years. Among the many effects of that growth, one has been the steady erosion of the individual freedoms of choice and responsibility so closely identified with idealized American life. It is physically impossible for large populations of goats or people to live together in reasonable harmony without restrictions on individual freedoms. Frontier behavior just doesn't fit city life.

We may not like it, we may not be aware of it, but as our numbers rise, the shorter must be our tethers regardless of the promises of politics, science or religion. Thus, the great success of capitalism, as measured by numbers, turns out to be the destroyer of democracy and individual freedom. G. K. Chesterton was on to something when he said, "Nothing fails like success."



EDITOR

Addressing the cause

I belong to the Church of Monday Night Football, so I wouldn't have gone down to hear G. Gordon Liddy and Hatim Hussaini debate the Palestinian question, but I found your report of it interesting. Liddy was quoted as saying that if someone attacked him, he would bash him back — a response popular with nearly everyone, including Palestians. I'm not sure that I would not, like Liddy, do a little terrorizing myself if strangers invaded and took Hesperia.

And that, I think, was Hussaini's point; terrorism can't be dealt with unless the cause is addressed. In this, I take no sides. If the Israelis are strong enough to take and hold most of Palestine, they will not be doing anything new in the history of man for we all live in rooms from which former occupants were given the boot. There are simply no original inhabitants of any part of this blood-soaked globe.

"War is Man's god — he has but one. And peace but the time it takes for the unhorsed warrier to mount and come on." — Edna Millay

10-19-86

D.P.

Willard Olney
Hesperia

So why are the flags all flying?

Help me with this. The flags you fly from your car and in your front yard are intended to tell the world that you are a patriotic American, right? But what, exactly, does that mean? That you agree with the foreign policy of our current administration, or that you do not and want your flag back? And if you say it means only that you support our troops, does that mean you agree or disagree with the use to which they have been ordered? Or do your flags mean (and I hope they do not), that a patriotic American is one who, as Col. Oliver North once said, will stand on his head in a corner if so ordered?

Of course, military men like North are supposed to obey first and ask questions later, but not civilians. We are duty-bound to question our leaders — it's the foundation of democracy. If we do not question, if we salute and obey automatically, we are no better than subjects of a dictator. We might like to think we were patriotic if we did that, but in fact we would be destroying America from within.

Thoughts like these chase themselves through my mind when I see flags flying while our troops are in Iraq and I hope some flag-flying letter will tell me, tell us all, what he means to say with his flags.

7-30-03

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